3: Clark, S-5 (1950)1951 MH1 Iraq MH1

CHAPTER ONE

THE BACKGROUND

THE COUNTRY AND THE PEOPLE

An appreciation of the present state of education in Iraq and the possibility of advance towards the goal of compulsory education is not possible without some reference to the history and present circumstances of the country.

Following centuries during which a brilliant civilization flourished, particularly during the Abbasid period, the country remained under Ottoman domination from the middle of the sixteenth century until the first world war. British interest in the port of Basra and the development of the oilfields caused the people to fear a continuance of alien domination but, after an uneasy mandate, the country now known as Iraq emerged in 1932 as an independent nation with membership of the League of Nations. The long period of Ottoman domination with an administration centred in a distant capital left its mark. Administrative reforms and some social advance were attempted during the period of the mandate. When, however, Iraq became an independent State its Government was faced with a legacy of ignorance, poverty and disease among all but a very small minority of the population. Attempts have been made by successive Governments to liquidate the effects of this legacy and, in certain directions, rapid and significant progress has been made. But economic, social and political problems of great magnitude remain, all of which have their effect on educational progress or retardation.

Under its constitution the country enjoys a democratic form of government with a limited monarchy and a cabinet responsible to parliament. Despite the rapid educational advance of recent years, the majority of the people are illiterate, and effective participation in the government of the country must inevitably be confined to a few.

Iraq covers some 175,000 square miles, mainly of alluvial plain stretching from the Persian Gulf through the central uplands to the mountains of Turkish Kurdistan and from the Arabian and Syrian deserts to Persia. Apart from the four principal towns of Baghdad, Basra, Mosul and Kirkuk, together with a number of